

### Regime transition, uncertainty and prospects for democratization: the politics of Russia's regions in a comparative perspective

Gel'man, Vladimir

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REGIME TRANSITION, UNCERTAINTY  
AND PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRATIZATION:  
THE POLITICS OF RUSSIA'S REGIONS  
IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

VLADIMIR GEL'MAN

Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung gGmbH (WZB)  
Reichpietschufer 50, D-10785 Berlin

Vladimir Gel'man is Lecturer in Russian Politics at the Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology, The European University at St. Petersburg. He has worked at WZB as a Visiting Fellow in 1998.

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Dr. Vladimir Gel'man  
Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology  
The European University at St. Petersburg  
3, Gagarinskaya ul.  
191187 St. Petersburg  
Russia

Tel.: (+ 7-812) 2755133  
Fax: (+ 7 - 812) 2755139  
E-mail: gelman@eu.spb.ru

## **Abstract**

In analyzing regime transition as an open-ended process, the paradigmatic approach of the paper provides an alternative to teleological schemes of the "transition to democracy". The process of regime transition, regardless of the regime type itself, includes several stages, such as the breakdown of the ancient regime, the uncertainty of the political regime, and the installation of the new regime. The key characteristics of the uncertainty stage are the uncertain position of actors and the institution-free environment. The completion of this stage is the installation of the new regime. Looking at some of Russia's regions as case studies of regime transition, the paper aims at understanding scenarios of outcomes of uncertainty and their impact on new political regimes.

The "winner takes all" scenario of outcome of uncertainty is likely to enhance the power monopoly of the dominant actor and the supremacy of informal institutions. The consequences of this scenario are the emergence of new political regimes with numerous aspects of authoritarian rule. These regimes could be relatively stable.

The "elite settlement" scenario of outcome of uncertainty generally includes the sharing of powers between dominant and subordinate actors in order to limit public political contestation and establish the supremacy of informal, rather than formal, institutions. These regimes are fragile and dependent on changes in the political situation.

The "struggle over the rules" scenario of outcome of uncertainty is likely to provide an institutional framework as a precondition to democratization in the sense of horizontal accountability through the institutional limitation on assertions of power. Until the institutionalization of the new regime, it still remains fragile.

Democracy is not emerging from regime transition by default. Only if political competition among actors within the framework of formal institutions continues to develop, transitions to democracy may occur as a contingent outcome of conflict, or as the "lesser evil" for the actors.

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## **1. Introduction: Is Democracy Developing in Russia's Regions ?**

For most Western and Russian scholars who have observed recent political developments in Russia, the evaluation of the Russian political regime as something "between authoritarianism and democracy" is common. The number of designations employing "quasi", "semi", "pseudo", "proto" and other "democracies" with descriptive "adjectives" (Collier and Levitsky, 1997) to qualify evaluations of democratic development have been widely used the last several years to describe Russia's political regime (see Gel'man, 1997, Vainstein, 1997, Temkina and Grigor'ev, 1998). How relevant are these approaches for analyzing democratization in Russia? It is impossible to provide a complete answer to this question concerning Russian politics without taking a comparative perspective.

The comparative-oriented approach to the study of national politics has two different, although overlapping, dimensions: First, widespread among political researchers are cross national (i.e. inter-national) comparisons. There are a number of books and journal articles that, to varying degrees, compare the experiences of Russia and Eastern Europe, Latin America and Southern Europe as they make (or made) the transition from authoritarian regimes. Although the theoretical foundations, as well as the implications, of such comparative studies are still uncertain (see polemic: Schmitter and Karl, 1994, 1995, Bunce, 1995a, 1995b), this research approach has become quite common in contemporary Russian politics.

Simultaneously, the second dimension of comparative studies of Russian politics, involving cross-regional (i.e. intra-national) comparisons, is still neglected among Western and Russian scholars. Although several comparative cross-regional studies have appeared in recent years, they have been primarily concerned with governance (Stoner-Weiss, 1997), separatist activism (Treisman, 1997), the elections of regional governors (Solnick, 1998) or simply described current developments without employing specific theoretical frameworks (McAuley, 1997, Kirkow, 1998). Furthermore, case studies of transition at the regional level have appeared in the form of articles (Melvin, 1998, Alexander, 1998), even monographs (Orttung, 1995), but they pay little attention to the important comparative potential of such case studies (see Lijphart, 1975).



An interesting puzzle arises from actual cross-regional comparison, as well as the comparison of multi-level (national and regional) political developments: If democracy is developing in Russia's regions, how can we explain significant diversity of such developments across the regions ? Are the regions less "democratic" than Russia as a whole, and why are some regions more or less democratic than others ? The perspective presented in this paper go a long way toward solving this puzzle.

Part of the solution includes the application and development of theoretical concepts. When examining the development of democracy, any researcher would be remiss in not noting Robert Dahl's classical model of polyarchy (Dahl, 1971) Including two vital dimensions of democracy, competitiveness and participation, Dahl used polyarchy to establish a matrix of political regime ideal types:

Table 1. Dahl's model of political regimes

<b>Competitiveness/Participation</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>High</b>	Competitive oligarchy	Polyarchy
<b>Low</b>	Hegemony	Inclusive hegemony

While the application of such a neatly constructed model would seem to be relatively straightforward, for Russia's developing political regimes-- both on national and regional levels -- such is not the case. On the one hand, the application of a minimalist view of competitiveness and participation in Russia's regions shows clear evidence of democratic development. The competitive elections of governors, as well as regional legislatures, is accompanied by inclusive participation, based on universal suffrage. Thus, Dahl's test of polyarchy seems to be clearly confirmed as almost half of the regional governors (primarily appointed by President Yeltsin) lost their offices in a wave of elections in 1996-1997 (Belin, 1997, Kolosov and Turovskii, 1997, Solnick, 1998, Gel'man, 1998a).

On the other hand, however, such a picture is analogous to making conclusions about the average world temperature through calculations based solely on the temperatures of Antarctica and Africa. There is great variance across a spectrum of intervening measurements that is ignored. Such is the case in Russia where there are many possible paths of political change across the 89 regions. Thus, despite clear signs of democratic developments, there is significant evidence of officially sponsored interference in electoral contests as well as the clear ineffectiveness of public participation that would undermine a such an evaluation. Similar practices are widespread in Russia's regions. Moreover, political developments in even the most "democratic" regions are still highly fragile, often depending on the political allegiances of political actors. Such was the case in Nizhnii Novgorod's 1998 mayoral elections, where regional authorities quickly denounced the results when the "wrong" candidate came to power. Finding a pretext of that candidate's criminal past, the election was eventually invalidated. (Gel'man, 1999).

Similar problems for evaluating post-authoritarian regimes are discussed in the transition literature (see polemic: O'Donnell, 1996a, 1996b, Gunther et al., 1996), further raising the question of what Dahl refers to as the "procedural" and "substantive" dimensions of democracy. Procedural notions of democracy generally focus on the existence of formally democratic institutions, such as a written constitution that recognizes a practice of regularly scheduled elections. Substantive democracy goes beyond simple procedures to add the norms of behavior and belief that underlie the political activities of elected officials and the existence of popular liberties. Within this context, the political institutions of Russia's regions, including the legislature, the executives, and judicial branches, the practices of law making, recognition of separation of powers, local government autonomy, electoral practices, the role of political parties and interest groups, and voluntary associations, etc., should all be reexamined in a comparative perspective.

The controversies of regional democratization in Russia are, of course, only a part of the general problems of democratization. Narrow explanations, such as provided by theories of "socio-economic modernization" and "political culture" fail to solve the regional puzzle. As there are many difficulties in explaining the democratic possibilities of a whole country, the in-depth examination of particular regions, and their "unique" political challenges, provides a valuable perspective that informs the

larger, national question of democratization. An answer to the question heading this section is still in process. The political evolution of Russia's 89 regions is far from monotonous. In striving to solve Russia's regional puzzle, the discussions that follow further contribute to the ongoing search for new frameworks of analysis, which could be helpful for understanding Russian politics as a whole.

## **2. Regional Political Regimes in the Russian Context**

The term "political regime" is commonly applied in varying political contexts - such as constitutional models (parliamentary or presidential regimes) or forms of government as a whole (democratic or authoritarian regimes). However, these classifications are not always applicable to studies of politics in transition, where such models are ill-defined and change sometimes rapidly. In light of these issues, the understanding of political regime should be reexamined. Thus, my use of the concept "political regime" is purely functional - as a set of: 1) actors with resources and strategies, and 2) political institutions (i.e. a set of rules and norms (North, 1990)). This definition is not related to institutional designs or ideological schemes such as, for example, totalitarian regimes.

Thus, as employed here the concept of regime requires a re-examination of Dahl's dimensions of political regimes. While one of Dahl's "procedural" dimensions of democracy - actor competitiveness - remains the same, the substantive dimension includes the type of predominant political institutions. Developing Guillermo O'Donnell's (1996) distinction between formal and informal institutionalization in so-called "new democracies", this dimension would include two polar ideal types, the supremacy of: 1) formal institutions (such as legislation, separation of powers, local government autonomy, elections, political parties, etc.) or 2) informal institutions, or arrangements of informal practices (such as particularism, clientelism, shadow economic relations). The former is associated more or less explicitly with principle of "rule of law", while the latter, by contrast, could be classified as "arbitrary rule". Within such a framework, the typology of political regimes is as follows:

Table 2. Political Regimes: Actors and Institutions

<b>Competitiveness of actors/ Predominant institutions</b>	<b>Informal ("arbitrary rule")</b>	<b>Formal ("rule of law")</b>
<b>Competitive</b>	Hybrid regime	Democracy
<b>Non-competitive</b>	Authoritarian regime	

The application of this concept of political regimes for analysis to regional politics in the Russian context gives rise to new challenges. One could say that any considerations about regional political regimes would be incorrect without taking into account the dependence of regional regimes on national political developments. It is true, however, that there is no empirical evidence of consistency in federal policies toward regions, either nationwide or toward particular regions. Since the late 1980s, the degree of political independence of Russia's regions increased in various forms and degrees (on separatist activism see Treisman, 1997). After the wave of 1995-1997 gubernatorial elections, the influence of federal authorities on political developments at the regional level became even more insignificant. Therefore, for an analysis of regional political regimes in Russia, it is possible to identify regional entities as if they were nation-states (as an analytical tool only !). Within this framework, federal authorities (as well as other actors outside a particular region) may be regarded as "external" actors, or as if one were analyzing the impact of international influence on national politics.

Political regimes that existed in the Russian Republic from the mid-1950s until the late 1980s - both on national and sub-national levels - were commonly regarded as authoritarian. Even pluralist-revisionist scholars, who analyzed regional politics in Russia, observed a significantly limited pluralism among actors, such as interest groups (see Hough, 1969), that was not accompanied by public contestation in the electoral arena. Despite differences in the political styles of regional elites, as well as differences in relative economic development and ethnic composition of Russia's administrative units, these regional political regimes were similarly configured along the lines of a set of actors and institutions.

The post-Soviet period of political development clearly demonstrated the large-scale effects of diversity in Russian regional politics, as shown through general processes of political transformation in Russia effected by democratization and decentralization (Gel'man, 1998a). In the late 1990s, the varieties of political regimes in Russia include some features of pluralist democracy in St. Petersburg (Orttung, 1995, McAuley, 1997, Gel'man, 1998b), authoritarianism in Kalmykiya (Magomedov, 1995, Senatova, 1996), even "warlordism" in Primorskii krai (Kirkow, 1995, 1998), as well as some hybrid regimes in other Russia's regions (Hahn, 1997, Afanas'ev, 1997). Thus, scholars of Russia's regional politics will need to provide an explanation of such varying phenomena: Why have once similar administrative units of the Soviet empire developed in such varying directions over the last ten years ?

There are two approaches for solving this regional "puzzle" based on the general frameworks for studying the changes of political regimes in a comparative perspective. The first framework, regarded as "structural" (Melvill, 1998) or "functional" (Hughes, 1999), connects causes and consequences of political changes with macro-level variables, such as level of socio-economic development (Lipset, 1960) or with popular values and attitudes (Almond and Verba, 1963) as well as with their social capital (Putnam, 1993). On first glance, however, these explanations are at least challenged by the actual practices of Russia's regional politics. We cannot truly employ the prism of socio-economic determinism to show that the political regime of pre-industrial Kalmykiya is closed to advanced industrial Tatarstan due to a lack of political competitiveness and the domination of informal institutions. It is also hard to explain the emergence of completely different political regimes in the city of Moscow (Brie, 1997) and in the Sverdlovsk Oblast' (Gel'man and Golosov, 1998, Luchterhandt and Rozina, 1999), as both regions exhibit clearly pro-democratic and pro-market orientations in mass voting behavior. As a result, the issue of applicability of these frameworks to Russia's regional politics will remain on the agenda of future discussions.

In this paper I will use the second approach - "procedural" (Melvill, 1998) or "transitological" (Hughes, 1999)- which explicitly rejects an idea of "objective" pre-conditions to democracy as well as to other forms of political regimes (see Rustow, 1970, Karl and Schmitter, 1991). Alternatively, this approach tends to explain the consequences of political regime change through the analysis of the transition

process itself. I will begin by considering some theoretical and methodological issues of employing a transitological approach and discuss re-designing this framework for more effective analysis. I shall then try to explain the emergence of differing political regimes in the post-Soviet transition, while raising the cases of certain particular Russian regions. I will close by presenting the implications and generalizations of this discussion.

### **3. Regime Transition and Uncertainty**

Early in their seminal book on regime transition, O'Donnell and Phillipe Schmitter raise the issue of transition from certain authoritarian rule to uncertain "something else" (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986), which could be democracy or a new authoritarian regime. Despite this degree of uncertainty, almost all works in this field are based on some kind of "iron law of democratization". Explicitly or implicitly, this type of research has been based on teleological schemes of political development. According to such an approach, all transitions will sooner or later achieve democracy (at least, in Dahl's "procedural" sense) as the final goal of political development. But there are no well-founded reasons of why this should be so, save for macro-historical speculations. This kind of "teleology of history" seems similar to a pure Marxist-Leninist paradigm of "historical materialism". In this paper, I prefer an alternative paradigmatic approach to analyzing regime transition-transition as a kind of open-ended process. At least, we know the "point of departure" (authoritarianism), but there is no way of knowing a priori the "point of arrival".

Speaking purely in functional terms, the process of regime transition (i.e. the shift of one political regime to another), regardless of the regime type itself, includes several stages: 1) the decline and, then; 2) breakdown of the previously-existing "ancient regime"; 3) some kind of uncertainty in all elements of the political regime, 4) the outcome of uncertainty, meaning the installment of a new political regime; 5) institutionalization of new political regime (regardless of whether a "democracy" or "something else"). Paradigmatic differences between "transitions to democracy" (Rustow, 1970, O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986) and an "open-ended" transition are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Stages of Regime Transition: “Transition to Democracy” and “Open-ended” Models

<b>“Transition to Democracy”</b>	<b>“Open-ended” Model</b>
1. Liberalization 2. Transition = Installation of democracy 3. Consolidation	1. Decline of ancient regime 2. Breakdown of ancient regime 3. Uncertainty 4. Outcome of uncertainty = Installation of new regime 5. Institutionalization of new regime

The crucial points in the process of regime transition are stages 2) and 4) - the breakdown of ancient regime (i.e. “entry” into uncertainty), and the installation of the new regime (i.e. “exit” or “outcome” of uncertainty). This “gap” of uncertainty completely differs from “transition to democracy” model, where the installation of democracy results from the breakdown of the authoritarian regime “by default”.

Uncertainty is a crucial stage of transition, which is distinct from uncertainties in stable regimes. As Valerie Bunce noted, the distinction is that within authoritarian regimes the positions of actors are more or less certain, yet the institutions are ill-defined (or uncertain). In democratic polities, however, the institutions are defined (or certain), while the positions of actors are uncertain or, at least, not defined a priori. During transition period, both these elements of political regimes - actors’ positions and institutions - are uncertain to varying degrees (Bunce, 1993).

The variations of uncertainty are more clearly understand in connection with the use of different models of transition (in the terms of breakdown of the ancient regime) employed by Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe Schmitter (Karl and Schmitter, 1991). They provide a four-cell matrix of ideal types of modes of transition, using as variables: 1) types of actors who play a crucial role in the transition processes, and 2) their use of strategies during the transition period.

As one can see in Table 4, these four modes of transition differ significantly in connection with level of uncertainty. Pacts tend to be minimally uncertain, while

revolutions provide large-scale (and, usually, long-run) uncertainty, connected with mass uprising and public violence.

Table 4. Modes of Transition (and level of uncertainty)

<b>Actors/Strategies</b>	<b>Compromise</b>	<b>Force</b>
<b>Elites</b>	Pact (Low)	Imposition (Middle)
<b>Masses</b>	Reform (Middle)	Revolution (High)

The key characteristics of the uncertainty are uncertain position of actors and the institution-free environment. Therefore, actors are free to fight for domination within the polity using all means for power maximization, but not for the creation of democracy. The period of uncertainty of Russia's national politics is clear evidence of this process. After the transition by imposition in August 1991, until to the violent outcome of uncertainty in October 1993, the struggle for the dominant position between rival actors - between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, and then between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet - is not likely to be evaluated as a "transition to democracy" in the sense of the normative theories. Even those politicians, who call themselves "democrats", have no intentions of losing their positions and being replaced by other actors.

Such rational actors would reject an idea of competitive democracy, which needs an establishment of formal institutions for free and fair political competition, and threatens the loss (or, at least, limitation) of their powers. Indeed, the maximization of one's own powers and the minimization (or, at least, elimination) of the powers of any other actors who potentially could challenge their positions, fulfills a rational actor's strategy in a stage of uncertainty. For certain regimes, this strategy is limited either by institutions (in democratic regimes) or by other actors' opportunities, such as their positions or resources (in authoritarian regimes). During a period of uncertainty actors either have no institutional limitations or have insufficient information about other actors' resources. If one actor has enough resources to overwhelm others, he (or she) simply occupies the position of the dominant actor. This position means an absence of limitations on the "leader" due to the relative weaknesses of other actors. If the resources of several actors are more or less equal,



their struggle for survival could develop in a form of bargaining, if actors use a compromise strategy, or, in the case of the use of force, in a form of permanent violent conflict, such as Thomas Hobbes' "war of all against all".

A period of uncertainty - even large-scale and long-run- cannot exist forever, however. This stage inevitably come to completion in one way or another. The outcome (or exit) of uncertainty could be regarded as a kind of reaction to the "entry" into uncertainty. Thus, partial use of the aforementioned Karl/Schmitter schema of modes of transition, engenders the development a matrix similar to Table 4 that focuses on scenarios of outcomes of uncertainty. Variable in such a matrix include: 1) the position of actors, 2) their use of strategies during the period of outcome of uncertainty (see Table 5).

Table 5. Scenarios of outcomes of uncertainty

<b>Positions of actors/ Strategies of actors</b>	<b>Compromise</b>	<b>Force</b>
<b>Dominant actor</b>	"elite settlement"	"winner takes all"
<b>Uncertainty or balance of forces</b>	"struggle over the rules"	"war of all against all"

The first of four possible outcomes of uncertainty, "war of all against all" is an actors' decision about outcomes, but does not yet qualify as an "exit" from uncertainty. If actors use force strategies, without one actor possessing overwhelming resources over others, the "war of all against all" will continue, probably evolving into new forms. The "warlordism" described by Kirkow in Primorskii Krai's political regime (Kirkow, 1995) is the typical result of such a scenario. If actors additionally use mass mobilization or even external intervention as a weapon in such a struggle, this scenario tends to be realized in a form of civil war. The case of the Chechen war is clearest in this respect. Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of new regime installation, this scenario of outcome of uncertainty does not regard as a unit for future analysis. A second scenario could be realized if the use of a force strategy became successful for one of the actors, and s/he achieved the position of the dominant actor. The result of this scenario is a dominant actor victory in a zero-sum game based on the principle of "winner takes all".

The third optional scenario of outcome of uncertainty could be developed as a result of an explicit or implicit agreement between the dominant actor and other actors over the common acceptance of institutions, which secured their current positions. This scenario is called an “elite settlement”, using the term by John Higley and other authors (Higley and Burton, 1989, Burton, Higley and Gunther, 1992). Finally, uncertainty or balance of force among actors, as well as danger of the defeat in zero-sum conflict, could the use of “weapons” in the struggle for survival. The regular use of democratic and/or legal institutions in the form of such weapons makes them invulnerable. This outcome could be regarded as a “struggle over the rules”, quite the opposite of “war of all against all” (i.e. struggle without formal rules).

Recognizing the matrix is simply an analytical tool, in practice the outcomes of uncertainty and installations of new regime could combine features of the different scenarios. For instance, Russia’s national political regime after the events of October 1993 was installed as a combination of the “winner takes all” and “elite settlement” scenarios. Yet, looking at some of Russia’s regions representing these ideal-types makes possible the logic of each other scenarios of outcomes of uncertainty and their impact on new political regimes. This brings us from theoretical considerations to the comparative analysis of Russia’s regional political regimes.

## **4. Scenarios of Outcomes of Uncertainty**

### **4.1. “Winner Takes All”**

The causes for the emergence of a dominant actor, who maximized his/her power through the use of force strategies, could vary widely. The long duration of uncertainty tends to discredit all political actors. Thus, the opportunities for “outsider” populists to seize all powers becomes more viable in cases of electoral contestation. The 1994 emergence of Lukashenko’s regime in Belarus, as well as Kirsan Ilyumzhinov’s regime in Kalmykiya in 1993, are clear examples of this outcome (as to Russian national politics, Zhirinovskii's electoral successes in 1993 parliamentary elections and Lebed’s achievements in the 1996 presidential polls come close to such a scenario). A foundation of mass support easily overcomes any potential problems that might arise due to the abolishment or elimination of any

institutional limitations to their arbitrary rule. The dissolution of parliaments, electoral fraud, limitations on the press elicit protests from groups only a narrow layer of political activists, who maintain a few resources under conditions of mass apathy. It is interesting to note that in the cases of Belarus and Kalmykiya various forms of political opposition - i.e. liberals, communists, and nationalists - created a negative consensus coalition. Without sufficient resistance, populist leaders are able to avoid political competition, even strengthening their positions through the "right" set of formal institutions. For example, according to Kalmykiya's electoral law, one third of deputies of the regional legislature are elected on a non-competitive basis from a list of nominations submitted by the President of Kalmykiya; moreover, the elections of these deputies are legally valid, if this list of candidates passes a minimal threshold of 15% of eligible votes (Senatova, 1996). As a result, populist leaders are able to assert control over the public sphere as a whole, based on traditional, rather than rational-legal mechanisms of legitimacy.

The assertion of power by democratically-elected executives in new democratic polities (see Huntington, 1996) is another option for the "winner takes all" scenario. Political leaders, who achieve top executive positions, even through support of democratic parties or movements, attempt to avoid horizontal accountability (O'Donnell, 1996) as well as avoid the danger of their electoral defeat. Mass support in an environment without formal institutions will likely result in the power maximization of the executive, using a combination of different strategies and institutions. The political regime in the city of Moscow is a case of such an assertion of executive power (Brie, 1997). The emergence of this regime is based on mass support of the mayor (Gavriil Popov, and then Yuri Luzhkov) in elections, and the a strategy to minimize the influence of alternative actors through public discrediting, administrative damage, and the incorporation of a system of "municipal capitalism" into the mayoral office. The political stability of this regime is enhanced by mass clientelism, making it easier to form a "political machine" in the mayoral office, which penetrates all levels of city government and is secured through the electoral legitimacy of the dominant actor as well as political regime as a whole.

Finally, the assertion of power may result from the decay of the previous political regime due to the long-run and large-scale uncertainty and "war of all against all". The case of Saratov Oblast' is typical in this respect. Sergey Ryzhenkov evaluates

the political struggle in this region during 1991-96 as “aspiration for the (re)establishment and assertion of the “obkom” position. This position is characterized by total political, economic and ideological control over the state sector and public life through the establishment of a hierarchical system of government without any control over the governing group” (Ryzhenkov, 1997). However, none of actors in Saratov failed to achieve such a goal. Long-run conflict continued over a period of five years, and all actors’ positions have been weakened (Stykov, 1995). Under these conditions, most actors were forced to agree to a “less evil” outcome. For example, since the former vice-mayor of Saratov, Dmitrii Ayatskov, came to occupy the position of the Governor, the political competition in Saratov Oblast’ has fully disappeared.

As one can see, despite different causes in the “winner takes all” scenario of outcome of uncertainty, the outcomes are similar to those “scenarios” without any breakdown of the ancient regime. These types of political regimes have emerged in some Russian republics, such as Tatarstan, where the ancient regime of the late-Soviet period directly transformed during the post-Soviet period into a power monopoly of the governing elite. In referring to the political development in Brazil (Linz, 1973), Juan Linz classified these regimes as an “authoritarian situation” rather than “authoritarian regime”. The principal distinction here is that the formal institutions of a democratic regime still survive (such as the legislatures, legislation, elections, or political parties), but have little influence on the decision-making process. The dominant actor has no obstacles to exclude other actors from the political process and secure direct or indirect control over the political society and the media. Any expectations that the dominant actors will disappear in the future have little foundation: under conditions of an absence of real alternatives, successful governments can survive, secure popular support and diminish any evidence of uncontrolled political activity. The emergence of political alternatives through the influence of external actors seems, at the very least, doubtful. The Russian national authorities have more needs for the stability, loyalty and predictability of regional political regimes, rather than an open political competition with unclear consequences. Such a mutual interest of external actors and the regional dominant actor tends to be institutionalized in the form of informal contracts between regional and national authorities (often confirmed by formal agreements). The scheme of “exchange of loyalty on non-intervention” is a core of these contracts.

Overall, the “winner takes all” scenario of outcome of uncertainty is likely to enhance the power monopoly of the dominant actor and the supremacy of informal institutions. The consequences of this scenario are the emergence of political regimes with numerous aspects of authoritarian rule. These regimes could be relatively stable, and the prospects of their democratization are minimal.

#### **4.2. “Elite Settlement”**

The scenario of “elite settlement” is close to a “pact” (Karl and Schmitter, 1991) which includes the reorganization of elite interests and the achievement of substantial compromises among competing actors over the crucial political issues. This perspective is commonly accepted by scholars of political transition that see “pacts” as the most effective (fast and peaceful) means of democratization (Rustow, 1970, O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986, Higley and Burton, 1989, Huntington, 1991). However, “pacts” which occur during the breakdown of the ancient regime are quite distinct from agreements achieved among actors simply for the sake of an end to uncertainty. The former (such as classical Spanish “Moncloa Pact”) focused on defining formal institutions, such as the rules of public contestation during regime transition. Alternatively, the latter is based on the actors' intentions to secure their positions and, thus, to consolidate the new regime under conditions minimizing of competitiveness. In a framework of “transition to democracy” pacts really serve as a mode of democratization. But the outcome of uncertainty through pact scenario serves to keep democratization pending, or, at least, of diminish the unpleasant consequences of democracy, such as the danger of lost of powers through public contestation.

This kind of “elite settlement” is based on explicit or implicit agreements between the dominant actor and his/her competitors over the sharing of powers, or the sharing of spheres of influence in a political market. Such a strategy is reasonable, even rational (see Marks, 1992), if the dominant actor has insufficient resources or other limitations for using a force strategy, while his competitors have enough resources for survival, but not enough for decisive steps toward the their own arrival as the dominant actor. Thus, both sides benefit from an “elite settlement”: the dominant actor secures his/her position, while his/her competitors receive access to subordinate

positions within the governing group (Case, 1996). The formation of a “minimal winning coalition” of dominant and subordinate actors is an immediate result of these pacts. The formation of this coalition has multiple goals, including preventing the breakthrough of political outsiders (who are not included in the “elite settlement”) to powerful positions.

Among Russia's regions, the case of Nizhnii Novgorod Oblast' is typical of this scenario (Gel'man, 1999). When appointed in 1991, Governor Boris Nemtsov had no influence on regional elites. Nemtsov was limited to a force strategy, yet achieved several important informal agreements with the majority in the regional legislature, parts of enterprise directors, and parts of the administrative elite of the region. These subordinate actors were loyal to Nemtsov as the dominant actor, yet acquired greater security in their previous positions. Nemtsov used this strategy to establish more effective regional government performance (Stoner-Weiss, 1997) and for successful conflict resolutions within and outside region that worked to his own benefit. At the same time, the political competition of actors has been limited. During the 1995 gubernatorial elections, Nemtsov won easily with an overwhelming majority; his vote totals were more than twice that of his closest challenger. In 1997, however, Nemtsov was appointed as a first deputy prime minister of the Russian government and left Nizhnii Novgorod, thereby undermining the basis of the regional “elite settlement”.

A scholar in Nizhnii Novgorod characterized the main features of the regional political regime under Nemtsov as follows: 1) prevalence of executive authority over the legislature; 2) an informal contract of mutual loyalty between regional and national authorities; 3) indirect control of regional authorities over the media; 4) neutralization or limitation of real or potential centers of political opposition in the region; 5) patronage of regional executives over public associations (both over political groups and “third sector” NGO's) in exchange of their loyalty (Borisov, 1996: 37). Although he referred to these features as “regional authoritarianism”, the relative autonomy of the legislature and political parties, the absence of explicit violations of political and civil rights provided more grounds for classifying the impact of Nizhnii Novgorod's “elite settlement” on regional politics as a hybrid regime, or “semi-democracy” (Case, 1996).

The case of Nizhnii Novgorod's "elite settlement" is not unique among Russian regions. Similar features of elite consolidation and regime transition have been found in Tomsk Oblast' by Mary McAuley (McAuley, 1997: 156-220). In his study of elite developments in Omsk Oblast', Neil Melvin has shown that the basis of a "elite settlement" between governing groups and left-patriotic opposition approached power sharing: the former won gubernatorial and city of Omsk mayoral elections, while the latter occupied the region's representative positions in the State Duma. As a result, elections did not challenge positions of the governing group (Melvin, 1998).

The achievement of the "elite settlement" does not mean, however, the sustainability of the political regime itself. It is challenged by the informal institutionalization of arbitrary rule that undermines functioning democratic institutions. In the case of Nizhnii Novgorod Oblast', core decisions about a regional program of economic reform in 1992 were issued not by legislature (or by any other formal institution), but by an informal Coordinating Council, which included the executive and legislative heads of the region and City of Nizhnii Novgorod. The continuation of these informal practices of decision-making provide a pre-condition for the danger of power assertion. Outsider populist Andrei Kliment'ev, who has a criminal background, and has been under investigation during the 1998 elections, won the mayoral race in the city of Nizhnii Novgorod. Due to victory of the "wrong" candidate, regional authorities denounced the elections and called for a new race. Thus, public contestation was limited. Nevertheless, in the next round another challenger won, finally breaking the "elite settlement".

This kind of "elite settlement" is generally fragile, and changes in the balance of actors' resources easily undermine its stability. The breakdown of the "elite settlement" either results in movement toward an "authoritarian situation" (if the dominant actor strengthens his/her position), or "entry" into a new cycle of uncertainty (if the dominant actor loses his/her position). For instance, President of Bashkortostan, Murtaza Rakhimov, remained in his post after a compromise decision among regional elites to increase opportunities for rent-seeking bargains with the Russian Center. After the problem was solved, Rakhimov - by one or another way - harmed the chances of his political competitors and asserted a power monopoly in the region (Rabinovich and Fufaev, 1997). In St. Petersburg, an attempt to form an

“elite settlement” was unsuccessful for other reasons. Mayor Anatolii Sobchak had an informal agreement with a majority of the city’s legislature to create for themselves favorable conditions for the mayoral and legislative elections. But those parties and interest groups, which were not included in the “elite settlement”, established a negative consensus coalition, which presented a candidate in the 1996 mayor elections. After the victory of opposition-backed candidate, Sobchak lost his post and a new period of uncertainty had been launched (Gel’man, 1998b).

The “elite settlement” scenario of outcome of uncertainty generally includes the sharing of powers between dominant and subordinate actors in order to limit public political contestation, and establish the supremacy of informal, rather than formal, institutions. These regimes are fragile and very dependent on changes in the political situation. Speaking more generally, this scenario tends to act as a “transition” between “winner takes all” and the following scenario - “struggle over the rules”.

#### **4.3. “Struggle Over the Rules”**

The third scenario of outcome of uncertainty could be describe as a transition from “war of all against all” to “struggle over the rules”. When force strategies are exhausted, and the level of uncertainty is relatively high, the positions of political actors threatened, either as a result of defeat in a “war” or due to unsuccessful bargaining over the “elite settlement”. Therefore, the installation and adherence to formal institutions becomes the only opportunity for actors to survive within a regime. In such a situation, institutions become a “weapon” for the actors (Geddes, 1996). Moreover, while supremacy of one actor tends to be fixed in the institutional design, the uncertainty or balance of forces are likely to lead to the general acceptance of those rules, which allows actors to avoid the “winner takes all” outcome (see Przeworski, 1986, 1988).

Political reform during 1994-97 in Udmurtiya is a typical case of the “struggle over the rules”. As local observers noted, “the constitution-making process in the republic was faced with contradictions... the compromise decision did not solve tensions between different groups of regional political elites. The prospects for establishing a



presidency for the Republic of Udmurtiya meant an opportunity for the full victory of one of these groups over its competitors. The outcome of this struggle was unclear, because the two main contenders had more or less equal political potential. Under this uncertainty, the Supreme Soviet of Udmurtiya, concluded that the rejection of the idea of the presidency would be the best solution of this political problem” (Egorov, 1998: 80). Although one of these contenders, Aleksandr Volkov, was the elected chairman of the regional legislature, he was unable to monopolize power in the region. His attempt to gain control over local government in region was terminated by a decision of the Constitutional Court of Russia. Therefore, the struggle of elites for power maximization was “forced to develop within the constitutional framework” (Egorov, 1998: 82). As one can see, the use of this framework really limited opportunities for the assertion of individual powers and saving opportunities for actors’ contestation.

The case of the Sverdlovsk Oblast’ demonstrated a more advanced version in the development of the “struggle over the rules” scenario. The use of formal institutions as “weapons” here was accompanied by the electoral competition of actors. Under the arbitrary rule of a dominant actor, the mass politics have been based on “political machines” and administrative mobilization. Alternatively, the “struggle over the rules” scenario created an environment for the emergence of a competitive party system. After the 1993 dissolution of the “Urals republic” and resignation of regional governor Eduard Rossel’, regional elites in the Sverdlovsk Oblast’ have lost their unity, and no actors occupy a dominant position. On the one hand, having lost access to administrative resources, Rossel’ was forced to use alternative mechanisms of electoral mobilization for his return to power; he headed his own political party, an organization labeled as a non-party movement “Transformation of the Urals”. On the other hand, the use of formal rules/institutions likely underlay the legislative decisions to create political institutions which excluded a “winner takes all” outcome (such as a PR electoral system and the autonomy of local government). Thus, even after victory in the 1995 gubernatorial elections, Rossel’ was still unable to monopolize power in the region. At the same time, his main contenders were forced to establish their own parties for elections to the regional legislature. After the series of 1995-1998 electoral campaigns, the party system of Sverdlovsk Oblast’ became the basis for competition among political actors (Gel’man and Golosov, 1998, Luchterhandt and Rozina, 1999).

Speaking more generally, limitations of political struggle by formal institutions makes unlikely the return of actors employing force strategies. Transferring this struggle into the field of electoral competition created an environment for contending with the various alternatives in the structure of a party system. In this sense, elite conflicts, rather than settlements, are more likely to limit the influence of informal institutions and aid in the growth of political society as a whole.

In the end, the “struggle over the rules” scenario of outcome of uncertainty is likely to provide an institutional framework as a precondition to democratization in the sense of horizontal accountability through the institutional limitation on assertions of power. Nevertheless, this outcome has not yet achieved a full-fledged, democratic regime as there has been no turnover of political actors within these same institutions. Huntington’s test of democratization based on the achievement of a second electoral cycle (Huntington, 1991: 266) is very helpful in this sense. Until the institutionalization of the new regime through the second elections of chief executives, it still quite fragile. In contrast with “authoritarian situations”, the consequences of the “struggle over the rules” scenario may refer to a “democratic situation” (Collier and Levitsky, 1997: 446).

The different scenarios of outcome of uncertainty and characteristics of new regimes in Russia’s regions are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Scenarios of Outcomes of Uncertainty and Characteristics of New Regimes: The Case of Russia’s Regions

Scenario of outcome of uncertainty	Consequences of outcome of uncertainty	Characteristics of the new political regimes	The cases of Russia’s regions
“Winner takes all”	“authoritarian situation”	monopoly of a dominant actor, informal institutions	Saratov Oblast’, Moscow, Kalmykiya
“Elite settlement”	hybrid regime	sharing of powers between dominant and subordinated actors, informal institutions	Nizhnii Novgorod, Tomsk, Omsk Oblast’es
“Struggle over the rules”	“democratic situation”	competition of actors, formal institutions, moving toward rule of law	Udmurtiya, Sverdlovsk, Oblast’

## **5. Conclusion: Actors, Institutions, and Prospects**

It is as yet unclear how this model of regime transition is applicable to the analysis of political developments in Russia as a whole. This issue is on the agenda for future research, however. At least three factors could challenge such a model: 1) the influence of external actors, 2) the influence of mass politics, 3) the dynamics of institutional changes. Until now, however, none of these factors have played a significant role in the changes of regional political regimes.

The influence of external actors - Russia's national authorities, as well as nationwide financial-industrial groups- is related to personalities who occupy powerful positions, but not with regional political regimes themselves. This lack of influence can be explained in two ways: First, state-building, which is based on the principle of rule of law, was not a priority task for Russian authorities. Second, the administrative resources of the Center, as well as its capacity to employ force strategies, were exhausted after the 1994-1996 Chechen war and the 1996-1997 gubernatorial elections. Although the Center has used some measures as substitutes for force strategies (such as pushing particular economic policies in the regions, the strengthening of presidential representatives as well as local governments vis-a-vis to regional authorities), it has not been very successful. On the eve of new wave of political struggles at the national level (especially during 1999-2000 national elections), the compromise strategy of the Center toward the regions - such as an exchange of loyalty for non-intervention scheme - seems the most rational.

The role of mass politics under conditions of widespread clientelism in Russia as a feature of Russia's political culture (Afanas'ev, 1997) is limited. "Political machines" as a tool of mass mobilization are more effective rather than social cleavages, which transferred into forms of political competition only if they supported by cleavages among elites (Gel'man and Golosov, 1998). There is no basis to connect these effects with the uncertainty of regime transition. In the long-run, "political machines" in American or Southern Italian cities have been undermined by modernization processes; after the breakdown of a system of mass patronage, mass politics played crucial role in political competition (Brie, 1997). Yet, this perspective seems doubtful under conditions of the arbitrary rule, which, pending developments

of incentives to develop a party system in the regions, seems to be the only alternative to a clientelist elite-mass linkage, at least, in the short-term.

Finally, political institutionalization in Russia strengthened rather than undermined regional political regimes. Arbitrary rule not only resulted from the decay of the ancient regime, but serves to strengthen actors in new political regimes, especially due to their use of rent-seeking strategies. There are no actors as of yet who realize that it is in their interest to shift institutional frameworks from arbitrary rule toward a rule of law. The emergence of such actors could be connected either with institutionalization of democratic situations during the “struggle over the rules” scenario, or with the breakdown of those regimes, which would result in the “winner takes all” and “elite settlement” outcomes of uncertainty.

Speaking more broadly, democracy is not emerging “by default” (or even “by design”). It became inevitable not because politicians, who call themselves “democrats” occupied power positions (even if they have good intentions). Democracy is a “contingent outcome of conflict” (Przeworski, 1988) - and nothing else. If political competition among actors continues to develop, transitions to democracy may occur. In this sense, Churchill’s well-known comment on democracy as a bad form of government, save for all others, means that political competition within the framework of formal institutions is simply the “lesser evil” for actors. The question, however, whether Russia’s actors - in national and regional levels - could choose the evil of democracy as really “less”.

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